

## Culture Bridge ...



... Means Understanding Others And Reflecting Our Own Situation

## Sankt Martin

The “Martinstag” on 11th November is a commemoration of ‘Martin of Tours’.

### Saint Martin – a brief description of the historic person

He was born in 316 AD. He grew up in Italy and became a soldier. One day he met a beggar in rags on the street. The beggar did not have anything that protected him from the cold weather. So he froze awfully. Without hesitation Martin took off his coat and cut through it with his sword and gave one half of the coat to the beggar.

In this night the Lord appeared to him and told Martin that the beggar had been himself. So Martin had given his coat to God. Martin then became a pupil of the bishop “Hilarius of Portiers” and founded an abbey.

After ten years Martin was elected to be the “Bishop of Tours”. However, he did not want to become bishop and he ran away. The people of Tours were running after him, because they liked him so much and wanted him to be their bishop. He hid in a stable full of geese. The geese made a lot of noise and the people of Tours found Martin, who then agreed to become bishop.

He became a good and famous bishop. He helped poor people, homeless people, beggars. He travelled around and told many people about Jesus. He died on the 8th November 398 and he was buried on 11th November.



The “Sankt Martins Zug“ – a children’s procession through the streets

In many regions in Germany, Austria , Switzerland and Southern Tyrol, little children go along the streets of towns and villages. In their hands they hold lanterns. The children are usually making their own lanterns in primary school or nursery school. There are always some children who make a lantern that looks like a goose, because the geese once showed the people where Martin had hid, but there are also lanterns that look like suns, moons, all kinds of animals, houses or even racing cars. A St. Martin’s procession is traditional in my region. In front of the children somebody rides on a horse, playing the Roman soldier Martin, who later became the bishop of Tours. On the evening of the 11th November, children and parents are walking down the streets with their lanterns and sing special St Martin songs. This is a ritual and very traditional. The children are learning these songs in their school lessons. After half an hour of walking through the streets, they all assemble at a place where a man in rags is sitting. He is acting the beggar who is discovered by Martin. All the children and parents are standing around him. There is always a nice atmosphere, because it is dark already in the late afternoon and an open fire is burning where the beggar is sitting. Everyone is singing and there is also usually a brass band accompanying the children on their way through the streets to the beggar. Then Martin appears on his horse. He is riding around the beggar. The beggar feels cold and so Martin gets off his horse, cuts through his coat and gives one half to the beggar. This is the moment in which all the people are quiet. After that, all the people get the traditional St Martin pretzel or other typical St Martin pastry. It depends on the region how the always sweet dough is formed. Here in Duisburg we can buy both, a pretzel and a ‘Weckmann’ in the bakeries. A ‘Weckmann’ is made of the same dough as a pretzel, but it has got the shape of a little man with raisin eyes and a plastic pipe on his belly. You can see it on one of the pictures.

